

Cuba's pressing need for humanitarian assistance and helped produce an unusually civil diplomatic exchange between Washington and Havana. The State Department, in a dramatic shift from its past policy of total intransigence on the issue of Cuba qualifying for U.S. disaster relief, initiated the discussions by publicly offering hurricane relief aid to Cuba. Shortly thereafter, Havana responded to the U.S. tender in a manner devoid of its usual bitter bite, thanking Washington for its kind gesture, but requesting that the Cuban government be allowed to have direct access for purchasing U.S. medical supplies and food and arranging for its delivery.

#### POLITICAL FALLOUT

The surprisingly new, almost amicable, tone in their discussions suggests that the beginning of a détente might be possible down the road. Such a development could prove to be politically beneficial for both Washington and Havana. Bona fide dialogue, beginning at a relatively low diplomatic level, which would focus on chipping away at the four decade-old and anachronistic trade embargo, rather than seeking its abrogation in one major step, would follow a realistic scenario. The fact is that aside from the more ultra right-wing members of the Miami Cuban-American community, and a handful of highly conservative legislators, support for the embargo rapidly has been withering away. Many in the U.S. business, religious, academic and agricultural sectors, as well as some of the most prominent cold war policy makers from the Reagan era, oppose the outdated embargo. In fact, advocates of the embargo have been overtaken by the recent hurricane food aid purchase and are now on the fringe of the U.S. political process.

Miami's Cuban exile leadership, now politically facing a dead end, would do well to assess the changing dynamics of U.S.-Cuban relations. In reality, the agreement on the purchase of essentials gives a marginal boost for the Castro government just when it was going through hard times due to the worldwide economic slowdown. The Cuban economy, already weakened by the recent region-wide reduction in tourism from EU and Canada, particularly resulting from the repercussions of September 11, faced the prospect of a major financial crisis considering the magnitude of Michelle's destruction. The American supplies should help in short-term relief efforts. More importantly, however, the arrangement could set an important precedent for future trade, as Havana would prefer to reduce shipping costs on imported goods, which in some cases have had to travel from as far as Vietnam, by instead purchasing from a neighbor only 90 miles away. It is estimated that Cuba now spends between \$700 million and \$1 billion on purchasing foodstuffs from U.S. competitors in Asia, Argentina and France, among others. Much of that amount, U.S. suppliers passionately believe, could be in their hands if regular sales between the two nations were permitted.

Castro derided the embargo as an act of economic imperialism, unjustly denying Cubans vital food and medical imports. While Washington's present move could prove to be a powerful political tonic for Castro and almost inevitably will lift his prestige, the delivery of U.S. goods (possibly even on U.S. vessels) to Cuban docks will attract positive international press coverage for the White House. The Bush administration will at least be an equal beneficiary of worldwide praise since it has been U.S. policy towards Cuba, and not the Castro regime, which has been discredited and isolated.

For Washington, the political motivation for its change of policy on hurricane relief is difficult to precisely track. Previously, the Bush administration sent Havana an inflammatory signal by nominating Otto Reich—an anti-Castro Cold War extremist who was tenaciously supported by the far right leadership of the Miami Cuban-American community—to the State Department's top Latin American policymaking post. The food and medicine deal, however, sends a constructive message to Cuba. Although the move has not been explained beyond its obvious humanitarian purpose, it is without question that the recent sale is in the interest of Cuban democratization and could signify that Secretary of State Powell desires to generate a constructive dialogue with Havana.

Until the State Department made its surprising move on hurricane relief, the decades-long schism between the two nations had been, if anything, worsening. Formulating a new, positive diplomatic posture could prove useful to the two nations as the Castro era approaches its natural end. To ensure that a peaceful transition of power will be the paramount goal of U.S. policy makers, Washington must not go back on its constructive posture. Even the most basic diplomatic ties will prove helpful in avoiding a bellicose struggle over the succession of leadership on the island that would inevitably affect the U.S. mainland. In fact, the two nations would be wise to widen the agenda of issues to be discussed to include the establishment of cooperative initiatives on drug interdiction, laws of the sea, refugee and air space jurisdiction as well as a broad range of economic, terrorism, trade, human rights observance and democratization concerns.

#### MOVE CONSONANT WITH RECENT TREND TO LIBERALIZE AND DISPENSE WITH EMBARGO

The humanitarian food and medicine relief agreement comes at an interesting time in the ongoing congressional debate on Cuba. For the past two years the Florida delegation on the Hill has lost much of its influence on issues pertaining to Cuba. The House voted to repeal the travel ban and measures to abrogate the entire embargo failed by relatively small margins. Several weeks ago, however, the Senate decided not to act on the controversial Cuba travel ban repeal, a move which was perceived to have pleased a White House loath to appear soft on Cuba.

Of greatest importance in the present trend towards more normalized relations, however, is the rising profile of the anti-embargo campaign by various U.S. farm interest groups as well as a broad range of multinationals and the legislators representing them, who are insisting that trade links with Cuba be extended in order to facilitate American exports to the island. On November 15, the Senate Agricultural Committee passed its funding measure, which permits federal financing of agricultural exports to Cuba, a bill that would establish a direct ongoing economic link between Washington and Havana. In the absence of such permissive legislation, there was no such financing involved in the Hurricane Michelle sale to Cuba. A delegation from the USA Rice Federation, which represents a majority of the nation's rice farmers, recently returned from a Havana International Trade Fair, marking the first official visit of a U.S. trade group to such an event in nearly four decades. Upon their return from Havana, USA Rice officials announced their support of the State Department's hurricane relief effort and the Agricultural Committee's vote on federal financing, as well as their serious interest in gain-

ing access for U.S. rice farmers to Cuba's billion dollar produce purchasing market.

#### THE LESSON OF HURRICANE LILI

In the past, Washington has been unyielding when it came to providing any form of disaster relief to Cuba if it was assaulted by a natural calamity. In 1996, when Hurricane Lili leveled thousands of structures on the island, the only U.S. relief effort came from one Miami-based Catholic Charities group. Historically, Miami exile polemics shaped the debate over Cuba, automatically ruling the country out from receiving any U.S. assistance. This obstacle still plagues efforts at constructively engaging Cuba today.

In 1996, militant anti-Castro forces argued once again that assistance sent to the island would never reach those most in need and would end up in the hands of Castro officials, where the goods would be used to strengthen a despised dictatorship. Some Cuban-Americans fear that sending aid would signify an ideological decision, not a humanitarian gesture. In the absence of such assistance, aid sent family-to-family as a permitted remittance would have to do the job, but it would not be sufficient in terms of total volume. That is why skeptics on this issue should reconsider and view Washington's recent step as an astute decision that shuns the sterile responses inexorably made by all White Houses dating back to the Kennedy era.

Furthermore, the State Department's monitoring of the 1996 church donation to Caritas, the Cuban equivalent of Catholic Charities, concluded that such aid had in fact reached its intended destination. Ironically, this little-recalled episode might have established a platform of trust between the State Department and Havana and encouraged U.S. officials to immediately intercede after Michelle rained its destruction.

#### TOWARDS RESTORED TIES

Despite the deep-rooted prevailing mistrust between the two capitals, Washington would be wise to follow Havana's lead in expressing its interest in expanding its present minimal ties. Washington should view the successful 1996 shipment of aid, the Senate Agricultural Committee's recent key vote, USA Rice's scouting of trade opportunities on the island, the Bush administration's intervention on behalf of the cash purchase, Havana's decision to let the goods be delivered by U.S. or third-country vessels, and the positive tone of the recent diplomatic exchanges between the two nations as the foundation for initiating talks that could produce the critical mass necessary for the development of positive relations in the coming months.

IN MEMORY OF PETTY OFFICER  
FIRST CLASS VINCENT E.  
PARKER, UNITED STATES NAVY

HON. CHARLES W. "CHIP" PICKERING

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 13, 2001

Mr. PICKERING. Mr. Speaker, today I rise before the House of Representatives to honor the life of an outstanding American, Vincent E. Parker. United States Navy Petty Officer First Class Vincent E. Parker is originally from Preston, Mississippi. Tragically, Petty Officer Parker was lost on Sunday morning, November 18, 2001, along with one of his shipmates,

Petty Officer Third Class Benjamin Johnson while serving his country in the Persian Gulf.

Vincent Parker, noted for his devotion to God and country, grew up in rural eastern Mississippi. He attended Macon Elementary School and graduated from Nanih Waiya High School in Louisville. He was a devout member of the Assembly of God Church in Columbus, Mississippi, and he grew up in a loving, well-respected family with five siblings.

Like his brother John, he enlisted in the Navy upon graduation from high school. He successfully climbed the ladder as an enlisted man and was rated as an Engineman First Class Petty Officer. He was serving onboard the USS *Peterson*. This deployment was to be his last, completing a successful career in the Navy. His mission on November 18th was to enforce the United Nations sanctions imposed upon Iraq following the Gulf War. He boarded *Samra*, a ship believed to be smuggling oil for Saddam Hussein.

Mr. Speaker, I want to pay tribute to Petty Officer Vincent Parker for his 19 years of service to the United States of America and the United States Navy. He is also to be commended for his life-long devotion as a son, husband, brother, father and citizen. Petty Officer Parker is survived by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Glenn D. Parker Jr. He is survived by his wife, Charlotte, and their two children, Vincent Jr. (age fourteen) and Rachel (age twelve). He leaves behind his sister Ruth Marie, and his four brothers, Glenn, Andy, Steven, and John.

Vincent was known onboard the *Peterson* not only for his Naval leadership, but also for the example he set as a citizen and man of God. He was simply known as "Butch" to his friends. He enjoyed the simple pleasures in life such as family and deer hunting. He will most be remembered for his devotion to God, country, and family.

Mr. Speaker, I ask our colleagues to join me in remembering an American hero, Petty Officer First Class Vincent E. Parker. Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with the Parker family at this difficult time. May God bless the Parker family, and may God continue to bless the United States of America with heroes like Vincent Parker.

#### INTRODUCTION OF SPECTRUM LICENSE POLICY ACT

**HON. JOHN CONYERS, JR.**

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, December 13, 2001*

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be an original cosponsor of the Spectrum License Policy Act of 2001, and I am hopeful we can pass this bill into law this year before we adjourn.

After months of negotiation in this matter, I am glad we have a deal that represents a win for everyone. It benefits the government by providing ten billion dollars in revenues to our Treasury. It benefits the original license holder by preserving the benefit of the bargain it had originally negotiated. It benefits our bankruptcy code, by preserving the doctrine of the stay and the power of the courts to enforce it, even against the government. And it benefits con-

sumers by permitting the spectrum to come on the market as soon as possible, fostering much needed competition.

In a very real sense we have reached this point because of the interest and involvement of the Judiciary Committee. When the Federal Communications Commission was seeking to unilaterally take away NextWave's spectrum assets, in violation of the automatic stay, this Committee weighed in to preserve the integrity of the bankruptcy code. The FCC was unable to ram their legislation through and the parties, to their credit, continued negotiating.

I am hopeful that this bill will serve as a precedent for achieving settlements for other similarly impacted parties. For example, I would note that Urban Communicators PCS LP, a minority owned enterprise, has also filed for bankruptcy and been engaged in a dispute with the FCC over spectrum rights. I would urge the FCC and the Congress to take up their case on an expedited schedule as well.

#### PAYING TRIBUTE TO J. PAUL BROWN

**HON. SCOTT McINNIS**

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, December 13, 2001*

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize J. Paul Brown for his contributions to the community of Ignacio, Colorado. J. Paul's civic involvement in the community spans over twenty years and involves the areas of agriculture, education, planning, and economic growth. I am proud to recognize him for his hard work and dedication in the following achievements.

J. Paul graduated from New Mexico State University with honors in 1975. In that same year, J. Paul became a rancher and entered the cattle and sheep market, a business he still runs today. In 1978, he began his civic service and was elected to the La Plata County Farm Bureau, serving later as President of the organization. He served on the State Board of Directors for the Colorado Farm Bureau, President of the Colorado Wool Growers, and was honored as the Colorado Wool Grower Of The Year in 1996.

J. Paul continued his service to the community and state as a member of the La Plata Planning Commission, Sergeant of Arms for Colorado Counties, Inc., and as Chairman of the Region 9 Economic Development District. As a father and firm believer in education, J. Paul was elected to the Ignacio School Board of Directors. His performance led him to the honor of being one of only five members in the state to be nominated for the State School Board.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored to recognize J. Paul Brown and his dedication to the community of Ignacio, Colorado. J. Paul comes from a long line of dedicated community activists, following in the footsteps of his parents, Casey and Jean, who have recently passed a milestone of their own by celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary this year. His own dedication to the community is amazing when one considers he has raised a family of four along with his wonderful Debbie, during his service

to the people of Ignacio and the State of Colorado. Please continue your service to the community J. Paul and good luck in your future endeavors.

#### DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS HEALTH CARE PROGRAMS ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2001

SPEECH OF

**HON. JERRY MORAN**

OF KANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, December 11, 2001*

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Chairman Chris Smith for his leadership this year. Our new Chairman of the Veterans Affairs Committee has served our Veterans well.

I am proud of the bill now before the House, H.R. 3447. It is a compromise that was achieved over several months by the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees. It contains measures from the health care bill that I introduced earlier this year, H.R. 2792, as well as proposals from a number of Senate bills. This bill will provide veterans greater confidence in their health care system, along with higher accountability for the VA.

Important Provisions of this bill:

Enables VA nurses to pursue advanced degrees while continuing to care for veterans. This aids recruitment and retention of nurses within the VA health care system, and promotes higher quality of care for veterans.

Mandates Saturday premium pay to certain VA patient care staff, such as licensed vocational nurses, pharmacists, and respiratory, physical, and occupational therapists. This provision will ensure that the VA remains competitive with other providers.

Requires the VA to develop a nationwide policy on health care staffing to promote safe and high quality care for veterans.

Establishes a 12-member National Commission on VA Nursing that would enhance the recruitment and retention of VA nurses and strengthen the nursing profession in the VA and nationwide.

Authorizes service dogs to be provided to severely disabled veterans suffering from spinal cord injuries, other mobility diseases, hearing loss or other types of disabilities that having a trained service dog would assist.

Modifies VA's system of determining "ability to pay" for VA health care services by introducing an index used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to determine family income thresholds. This would reduce hospital co-payments by 80 percent compared to current law, for near-poor veterans who require acute hospital inpatient care.

Strengthens the mandate for the VA to maintain capacity in specialized medical programs for veterans by requiring each network of VA facilities to maintain a proportional share of national capacity in specialized health care programs, guaranteeing that these programs will be there if disabled veterans need them.

I am pleased to report that the bill establishes a program of chiropractic services in each network of VA facilities. It authorizes the VA to employ chiropractors as federal employees as well as to contract for these services.